

January 4, 2017
Public Informational Meeting
OWB Packers LLC Brawley Beef Plant WWTF & Reclamation Areas
Brawley, CA

The following paragraphs provide a list of the questions that members in the audience raised during the meeting, followed by the response that the Regional Water Board staff provided during the meeting (unless otherwise indicated).

Q: Is the Discharger in compliance with the current permit (WDR) and their Time Schedule Order?

A: Yes. The Discharger is in compliance with the two Orders. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: Who is paying for the infrastructure and operation of the plant?

A: OWB Packers is paying for the process and the cost of the improvements. We don't know how they obtained the financing. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: If there is a fine, who is paying for it?

A: The Regional Water Board can assess an Administrative Civil Liability (ACL)/fines against the company, if they were to violate their Order. There is a statewide enforcement policy in place and we try to address [noncompliance] issues early on. The Regional Board sends Notices of Noncompliance requesting improvements be made to bring them back into compliance. If problems persist, we take further enforcement action. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: What does the [solid] waste from the [proposed] system go?

A: The system does not generate sludge. Typical wastewater facilities generate sludge that the facility has to pay to have it hauled off. But with the [proposed BioFiltro] system, all worms and bacteria are excreting and that casting is beneficial to farmers who reapply it to their land. (Mia Anne Haley, BioFiltro Inc., on behalf of OWB)

Q: Who pays for the maintenance of the system?

The maintenance is all privately funded; not by a public entity. Once every 18 months to two years, the castings from the worms which gather on the surface are removed and fresh wood shavings are placed. (Mia Anne Haley, BioFiltro Inc.)

Q: Are the ponds lined?

A: With this new system, there are no ponds. It is above ground and contained in concrete basins. OWB Packers does intend to use Ponds 2 & 3, which are unlined. Because of the high clay content in this area, there is very little percolation into the ground. There might be a little bit of treated wastewater that percolates to the local groundwater. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: Once water is cleaned, how much of the water goes back into the lot next door, the 140 acres?

A: The [proposed] permit only allows 238 GPD to be applied to the fields on average. Based on the ROWD received, the fields only need ¼ of water to irrigate the Bermuda grass fields. It is a small portion of the overall irrigation supply to the field. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: With the previous plant there was an issue with the stench, what guarantees can you give the community there won't be an odor?

A: The [proposed] permit has a Prohibition against nuisance conditions. If there are any odors, there is monitoring equipment to give us immediate knowledge of [odors]. We intend to be very proactive in regulating the Facility with extensive monitoring. If the Discharger violates the prohibition, the Regional Board can take enforcement action. The Permit is structured in such a way where we're able to make establish checks-and-balances to ensure the ponds have sufficient Dissolved Oxygen so they don't emit objectionable odors. The permit has an effluent limitation for a minimum Dissolved Oxygen. We want the water that comes out of the storage ponds to be aerobic so it doesn't smell. We're asking the Discharger to monitoring daily for DO. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE; Jose Angel, EO)

Q: What if there is a problem? Will it be reported to the City?

A: If the Discharger receives a complaint about odors, they are required to investigate and send the Regional Board a report of the complaint within 15 minutes of receipt of the complaint so a Regional Water Board staff member can verify the Discharger is following up on the complaint and also verify to what extent the odor has the potential to create a nuisance so that the Regional Water Board can follow up accordingly. (Jose Angel, EO)

Q: How will we make sure everything will work?

A: We feel the permit has been structured in such a manner that we will be able to verify the monitoring data submitted by the Discharger. And the water stored in the ponds will be kept aerobic with a minimum amount of Dissolved Oxygen so it won't cause [objectionable] odorous conditions. We believe we'll be doing our job and addressing the public's concerns. The existing permit has nothing to do with the City of Brawley. The existing permit only regulates the discharge to the unlined ponds. It does not authorize OWB Packers to discharge the City. The proposed permit allows OWB Packers to discharge for storage of the ponds and also the reclamation areas, 140 acres. (Jose Angel, EO)

Q: What can OWB Packers do to give the community a sense of peace?

Odors that are currently coming into the City of Brawley are not from the facility. The facility is at reduced capacity when we're rendering. If the permit is adopted, the new system would eliminate the anaerobic covered ponds, which would cause the odor. We are doing everything we possibly can to ensure our new facility doesn't end up with issues from the past. We have spent numerous amount of hours exploring to find a system that works for us. This technology will help alleviate any concerns. (Eric Brandt, OWB Owner)

Q: Where will the station be located?

A: There is an extensive monitoring program that is a part of the permit. Monitoring will take place at multiple locations; Influent to the plant, the Effluent at various stages in the process. It will be monitored as it goes into the ponds and then goes to the fields and also the tile water from the farm field. Monitoring reports will be submitted to our office for us to review. (Doug Wylie, Senior WRCE)

Q: What's the purpose of monitoring for BOD?

A: We want to measure BOD in effluent to make sure there isn't too much organic matter on the irrigation field because it can clog the soil. If the soil is clogged, the [applied wastewater] won't infiltrate and can create nuisance conditions. (Jose Angel, EO)

Q: What if it exceeds limits, will the water be recycled back into the filter system? What happens to the water?

A: Since the BioFiltro removes up to 99 percent of the contaminants, the effluent is very beneficial. Farmers use it for their crops since there are nutrients in the water, it helps the crops grow faster and more naturally. Multiple plans are set in place in case the discharge permit limits are not met. (Mia Anne Haley, BioFiltro Inc.)

Q: Will there be any burning of organic matter at the plant?

A: We are going to be rendering. The flare of the anaerobic gas can be considered as burning since you're burning some of the natural gas. Some burning of the natural gas might occur thru the anaerobic pond until the Bio Filter system is built. We won't be burning it thru the boilers as National Beef was doing. (Eric Brandt, OWB Owner)